

Innovations In Greek Political Communication And Consequences: Significant changes from 1981-2009

Anastasia Deligiaouri

TEI of Western Macedonia, Greece

E-mail: a.deligiaouri@kastoria.teikoz.gr

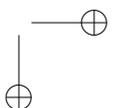
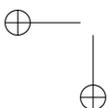
Abstract

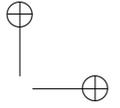
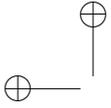
The introduction of new communicative ethics in politics has imposed new procedures and values in politics. The close inter-relation of media and politics has many facets and effects on the way politics is exercised and on how it is perceived by the citizens. This article investigates how new methods of political communication have been internalized into Greek media democracy, dividing the period from 1981 to the present into five periods of media democracy based on significant events that signaled

the transition towards new communicative and political ethics. A study of articles from two newspapers provides useful insights into the role of the media, especially during electoral campaigns and in politics in general. Our research also reflects how the specific socio-political context of the country interferes and affects the adoption of "imported" methods in political communication and how these methods affect citizens' political behavior.

Keywords: political communication, newspapers, citizens, "americanization", media democracy, elections

‘**M**EDIA DEMOCRACY’ is the term which signifies - in the most vivid and succinct way - the close inter-connection between the media and politics. Most of the current theoretical approaches allege that nowadays there is not only a strong connection between the media and politics but also that they overlap to such an extent that it is difficult to distinguish between them (the fusion or symbiosis model, see Meyer & Hinchman 2002:49-52). However, the characteristics of social and political life in a specific society do affect the realization of any model. We believe that the presentation and analysis of the Greek case can illustrate two facts:





First of all The Greek case highlights the fact that American-style methods of political communication methods and neoliberal economic structures seem to prevail in Western democracies. Greek media democracy can be adequately understood only if it is placed within this global political context which is governed primarily by the rules of the free market and of a free economy. Transnational capitalism and hyper-industrialism, enriched by the spirit of neo-liberalism and progressive privatization, are the key factors in the “deregulation” scheme in media industries (Sussman, 2005). Convergence in economic conditions and mediated perceptions of politics are unifying factors in the easy acceptance and application of the “Americanized” model of political communication in post-industrial societies (Norris, 2002).

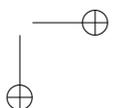
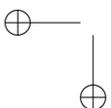
Second, the specific conditions and particular character of each political setting both determine and define the nature of the adaptation of the specific model. This is portrayed in the analysis of the Greek case which, while maintaining a resemblance to the general model, at the same time reflects its distinctiveness. Social conditions, specific facts and national events that demand special political treatment transform media democracy into a unique case for each country that should always be examined *in concreto*.

This article first summarizes the basic characteristics and consequences of media democracy in politics and then attempts to relate this to Greek media democracy by highlighting its relevant particularities.

Facets Of The Americanized Model In Political Communication

The media spectrum has covered political and social life in full, and whether our research focuses on procedures, political discourse or political ideas, it is obvious that politics has to tolerate its colonization by the media. In any colonization situation, moreover in media colonization, the crucial question arising focuses on the dominant part which prevails against the other. More specifically, hypothetical questions could be formed in such a way: Are the media imposing their own rules on politics or vice versa? Who is in charge of the function of media democracy? Meyer & Hinchman (2002) envisage:

“In colonizing politics the logic of media system does not simply restructure the way the political is portrayed or its relation to other systems; it affects



the political process at the 'production' level, i.e. where the political sphere emerges as a unique form of life." (2002:57).

Enzensberger (1974), approaching the issue from a realistic viewpoint, ponders over the problem of media power. As he proposes, the issue is not to find out whether the media have power, since their ability to affect public opinion is indisputable, but rather that the key issue is actually who controls media and who exercises power *in* and *within* this context.

In this undefined relationship between media and politics, it is herein assumed that the media defines political procedures, rather than vice versa. The implications that the media may have on politics concern both the “**internal**” (procedures, decision) and “**external**” sphere of politics (methods of publicity, citizens’ perception of politics). The problems detected in our research are related to both spheres, underlying the fact, however, that the external side is naturally vulnerable to the medium of publicity while the internal sphere could have kept some degree of independence.

It is quite impossible to summarize the entire discussion on media democracy, yet we can briefly refer to the main features and consequences of the well-known term of “**Americanization**” (Papathanasopoulos, 1996, 2000b; Swanson & Mancini, 1996). To achieve better control of this wide topic, a few basic thematic categories have been developed and our remarks included in them. Therefore, the most important and representative implications are considered to be the following:

- a) Important consequences are detected in the **representative character of democracy**. In the first place, the media does not always provide equal access to all politicians nor to all political opinions. Hence, specific political elites are more privileged in their participation in the media public sphere. Second, the internal sphere of **political parties** has been altered due to the lack of interest from citizens, something which mainly derives from the decline in ideological representations in political parties and, consequently, a decline in the representative basis of political parties. Political parties have lost their main democratic liability and have failed to adequately address their duty of articulating social interests with their own public discourse. The absence of strong ideological bonds has loosened the structures of political parties and, in some cases, has changed the whole image of the parties themselves.

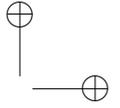
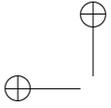
New forms of “inclusive” parties have appeared, fighting to convince us of their ability to cover a wide political spectrum of ideas and serve the democratization of political opinions. To this end, TV has contributed to this “apolitical” situation by promoting not ideological battles but instead spectacular quarrels that provide neither political proposals nor solutions; they are simply another aspect of the well-known “infotainment” effect (Bennett 1999).

- b) Furthermore, **functional and structural problems in basic constitutions of parliamentary democratic procedures** and values have occurred, such as the diminishing role and power of Parliament and the role of the political parties in it, as a result of media intervention in politics. Malfunctions in the representative character of contemporary democracies have imposed chain reactions on institutions concerned. If problems within political parties are discerned, then it is quite obvious that both parliamentary procedures and the symbolic power of parliament will be inevitably weakened. Much more importance and attention is given to the political representation of parties on TV rather than in parliament. Nowadays, elected politicians do not necessarily represent different social groups and interests but, instead, are invariably elected based on the frequency of their appearances on TV. A new political “virtue” was promoted within media democracy; a politician’s communicative ability and appeal on TV regardless of the political argumentation articulated. Moreover, being popular on TV does not necessarily mean being real as well. Hence, on TV, “plausibility” sometimes equates to truth.
- c) **Political communication** and electoral campaigns have become another communicative strategy in the hands of experts, ignoring real political decisions (Sussman, 2005). In the neo-liberalism milieu, where political consultants and market experts are involved in elections much more than voters themselves, politicians are undoubtedly used like any other “product” in an effort to reach a wider audience. Modern communicative methods expect politicians to engage in politics under the logic of “playing” rather than “acting.” **“Theatricalization”** is the key term in order to understand all the above procedures (Meyer, 2000). Market rules also apply to political information, which is gradually being detached from real problems and social expectations.

- d) The **replacement or absorption of the public sphere from the media sphere** which leads to the absence of political dialogue, a lack of political activism and so on is one of the key arguments in the discussion on media dominance (Dahlgren, 1995). In the era of extended visibility, the concept of “public” as a place of common, shared experiences and exchange of ideas has shifted to television screens. Citizens nowadays are engaged in representations of the world provided by the media and form their experiences based on the constructed yet “**common visibility.**” Henceforth, since these media representations are carefully de-politicized, political attitude easily conforms to media politics and their trends.
- e) Serious changes in the **political behavior of citizens** that have been regarded first as viewers and consumers of political spectacle on TV and afterwards as voters (Entman, 1989; Edelman, 1997). The electorate is “consuming” politics in these rapid media times and the crucial time for politics to be understood, appreciated and judged is being replaced by media mechanisms. The borders between media time and political time have become confused and unified, thus also blurring their functions. Finally, de-politicization and the transformation of ideology have been identified as the main consequences of the above situation (Deligiaouri, 2006).

On the other hand, the **positive contributions** that the media has imposed on political life should not be ignored. The direct and “live” information that citizens obtain from TV, the continuous exercise of control of politicians by journalists, leaving little room for mistakes, and the democratization of the freedom of speech (under preconditions that should be maintained) are some of the positive aspects of democracy in an “Information Society.” Certainly, in-depth analysis reveals that the quantity of information is not always synonymous with “quality.” The latter sometimes does not meet the predetermined expectations and can be a controversial issue.

The basic characteristics mentioned before aim to provide a general framework of the “americanization” of political communication methods as these are detected in the majority of cases. This article will concentrate basically on the communicative strategy and methods that have changed steadily because of the introduction of this model in Greek politics. Therefore, we are looking through newspaper articles, how opinion polls, TV debates, political adver-



tisement and similar new political communication methods were employed in Greek electoral periods and how their significance is reflected in the front pages of newspapers.

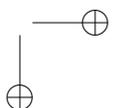
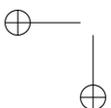
The author believes that media democracy is not another form or evolution of a traditional, representative democracy. Nowadays, media democracy is the dominant form of contemporary politics, and, as has been recognized, it is the main forum where power is exercised. In corroboration of this statement, most of the surveys conducted indicate clearly that the media is the main source of both political action and, at the same time, information. The media has permeated all aspects of political life. Perhaps reference should be made not only to the “communication of politics” (Negrine, 1996) but also to the “politics of communication,” a term which seems to have an even more powerful connotation.

Research Question and Hypothesis

The aim of this research and the main research problem it addresses is how new methods of political communication as introduced by the “americanization” model are internalized in different ways and levels according to the specific conditions that prevail in different countries.

Our hypothesis is that for the Greek case this gradual internalization of new communicative methods especially during electoral campaigns is related to two correlated variables:

1. The political situation of each electoral period. Therefore where there is a strong political controversy we assume that not much significance is put on communicative methods but rather on political argumentation.
2. The specific characteristics of Greek society and its structure that affect the way these new communicative methods are accepted and appreciated in Greek political system.



Innovations In Political Communication In Greek Politics

a) Methodology in newspaper articles

In this article, five periods of Greek media democracy are proposed according to the international innovations in communication adopted or affected during each period, in this way illustrating the gradual internalization of new tools into political communication. The argumentation and research provided in this paper is twofold.

First, we undertake a content analysis of the front pages of two high-circulation newspapers in order to capture the general impact of the development of new methods of political communication as well as their effect on politics. Literally, this involved counting the frequency of the references in each newspaper's front-page articles that concern methods of political communication. (see below ii)

Second, according to our findings and by combining these with key events that signaled the advent of new methods or the changing significance of existing ones, the different periods of Greek media democracy are identified.

In order to make the findings of the research more comprehensible to the reader, our theoretical standpoints are underlined, justifying both the structure and the preliminary choices made in this research.

More specifically the steps in our methodology are the following:

1. We use two widely-circulated newspapers, one published in Northern Greece ("Makedonia") and one in Southern Greece ("To Vima"), which also reflect opposing political ideologies. The former is supportive of the conservative political party (New Democracy-ND), while the latter traditionally maintains a positive view of socialist ideology (Pan Hellenic Socialist Movement-PASOK). In this way, an attempt is made to provide both geographically and ideologically opposing views.
2. The content analysis applied concerns only the front pages of the newspapers based on the rationale that headlines and articles on the front page reflect the most up-to-date events, topical subjects and major political news. We assume that when new methods of political communication are in the headlines of political news, they constitute an important

topic on the political agenda. It could also logically be assumed that when media involvement is not on the front page, political interest is also low.

3. The content analysis of the articles is searching for *key words* or phrases that refer to new methods of political communication or reveal the importance of the media in the political scene (for example words like “polls”, “debates”, “political consultants” etc). *Each article, regardless of the total number of references included in it, is counted as only one reference; therefore, our unit of measurement is the article itself; simply, it is the number of articles that is counted not the number of references in the articles. References concerning the re-utilization of traditional methods of political communication within the media (eg: political rallies covered on TV “orchestrated” are also included).*

More specifically, in the word count, we have included references to the role of TV, opinions polls, political debates, political advertisements, exit polls, communication strategies, profiles of leaders, the role of consultants and the role of Internet. On a second level, the content analysis implemented takes a more qualitative and critical approach, analyzing the general content of an article and evaluating its relevance to new communicative settings. In this qualitative interpretation of the articles we justify the five periods of media democracy in Greece.

1. The research was conducted into the official electoral periods for each election that has taken place from 1981 onwards. This choice is based on the fact that is easier to detect the importance of methods of political communication and innovations during periods when political information increases (Plios, 2004:58) and when political opposition becomes more intense leading up to important elections, as was the case.
2. The 1981 elections were chosen as our starting point because these were the first elections following the Restitution of Democracy in 1974, when the political struggle was particularly intense and when the regulation of television air-time emerged as an important factor in political rivalry.

b) Analysis of the results

In general, the number of references on the front pages of the newspapers (headlines and articles) has proved that the impact of media involvement in political campaigns progressively evolved as Greek society became more emancipated, at the same time accommodating the "Americanised" model in political campaigns and the role of the media in them (Sussman, 2005). It should be pointed out, though, that in cases where there was a national crisis involved (eg: 1989a and 1989b elections) or other important events of national interest (eg: forest fires during the 2007 elections), references to methods of political communication diminished significantly. This may be due to the fact that such social problems and their impact naturally take precedence over the discussion of communicative tactics. This fact verifies our hypothesis regarding the first variable.

The following diagram provides a comparative portrayal of the two newspapers:

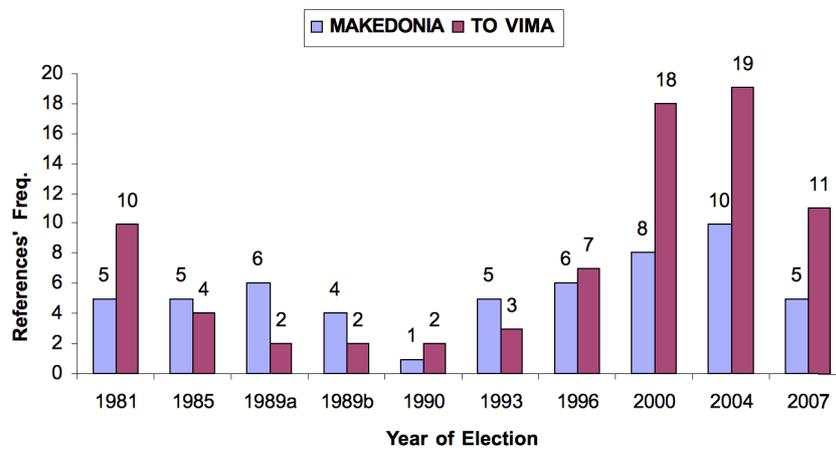


Diagram 1: Comparative representation of references in two newspapers

More specifically, conclusions drawn from the above diagram could be summarized in the following points:

Quantitative analysis

- The frequency of references in methods of political communication remains at almost the same level from 1981 until 1990, yet noticeably declines in 1989, coinciding with a very unstable political situation in Greece in 1989 and 1990. After two successive elections (1989a and 1989b), the country was at a critical point politically as it faced the dilemma of no government being elected for a third time, due to the failure of the 1989a and 1989b elections to form an independent, self-sustained one-party cabinet. 1990 was also the year that private media, after their unanticipated entry in 1987, made their first steps into politics but still under a veil of legal uncertainty, since their existence depended on political decisions.
- From 1993 and in the following elections, an upward trend is evident. Certainly one reason for this tendency is the new commercial media that had opened up new horizons in political communication, bringing new rules to the political game and complying with international methods of communication.
- The political struggle in the elections of 2000, after almost 20 years of the socialist party being in power, was extremely hard. This intensive struggle is also reflected in the references to the media and to methods of political communication, (opinion polls, TV, Internet) as political parties were making a continuous attempt to use or re-invent new forms of communication in the hope of winning the elections.
- The decline in 2007 is due to the catastrophic fires lasting for a week or more turned Southern Greece (the Peloponnese) into a desert area. Consequently, political contradiction was not considered “politically correct” and was replaced by a national feeling of unity to help and comfort the victims. This conclusion verifies somehow the second variable of our hypothesis.

Qualitative content approach of the articles and special conditions

- In the elections of 1981 and 1985 the majority of the references on TV concern the regulation of a fair political competence arena in TV and the

setting of necessary regulations to prevent public TV from paternalism in favour of the governing party.

- In the elections of 1989 (a and b) and 1990 the political struggle and the aim of forming a sustainable government left aside communication strategy. A strong and sometimes offensive political argumentation can be detected between political parties centering on the tactics and main policy of the opposing party. New commercial media were still in their infancy at this time and some reservation regarding their role can be observed in the references. In the front-page articles, though, we can find the first hints and critical comments on the newly-emerging mediated political setting that was shifting the core of political argument towards the strategic use of the media and images.
- From the elections of 1993 and thereafter, media interference matured, as it was now fully appreciated by politicians for its importance and, as a consequence, its role was increasingly accepted. Appearances of politicians on TV marked an important turning-point which was commented on sufficiently in the press. Opinion-polls also became increasingly significant and their results became a reliable political barometer for newspapers.
- The 1996 elections are well-known for the transition of the political arena from rallies to the TV arena following the decision by Kostas Simitis (the Greek Prime Minister) to keep political opposition within a calm, more “civilized” environment. The first debate between party leaders did actually happen but with only two participants, the political leaders of the two major parties. Critical remarks arguing about the loss of politics and the “couch elections” (Kakepaki, 2001:53), see increasing publicity and cast doubt on the nature of the newly-emerging political setting. Ambiguity is noticeable in the articles’ references.
- Gradually, from 1996 until 2007, the articles’ references put growing emphasis on “trendy” methods of political communication, and the political struggle tends to have become a synonym for ‘political spectacle.’ Political communication methods and their impact are in 80% of the front-page articles and more space is devoted in these front pages to the presentation of rather than to party policy. Websites, political advertisements, Internet, attention to the political profiles of the readers and professional consultants supporting electoral campaigns are at the

centre of the political agenda. The apathy of citizens is at the forefront of research studies. Politics is gradually no longer perceived as a participatory act towards providing solutions to social problems but instead as a TV theatre where well-dressed and well-prepared opponents fight for power.

By analyzing each newspaper, the following can be seen:

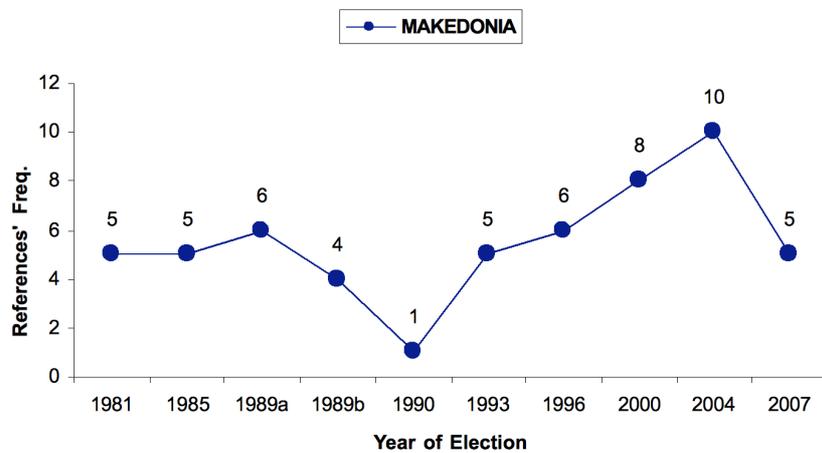


Diagram 2: Representation of references in *Makedonia* newspaper

- A slight increase in the frequency of references is evident between 1985 and 1989 (a) due to the fact that the political party that “Makedonia” was supposedly supporting (ND) was not in power. Therefore, a significant number of articles express strong criticism of the manipulation of the media (still during the era of state monopoly) in favour of the governing party.
- Again, there is an increase from 1993 onwards, showing the ongoing rise in the importance of the media. The “peak” in 2000 is because the political struggle during this electoral period was extremely intense and ambivalent since the liberals (ND) were striving to win the elections after having been in opposition for almost 20 years.
- In 1996, “Makedonia,” due to the financial problems it faced, ceased publication. In Diagram 1, the frequency of references to the elections

of 1996 is shown against the previous and the following electoral period and in relation to the general tendency in the newspaper. For the socialist-aligned newspaper “To Vima,” the following can be seen:

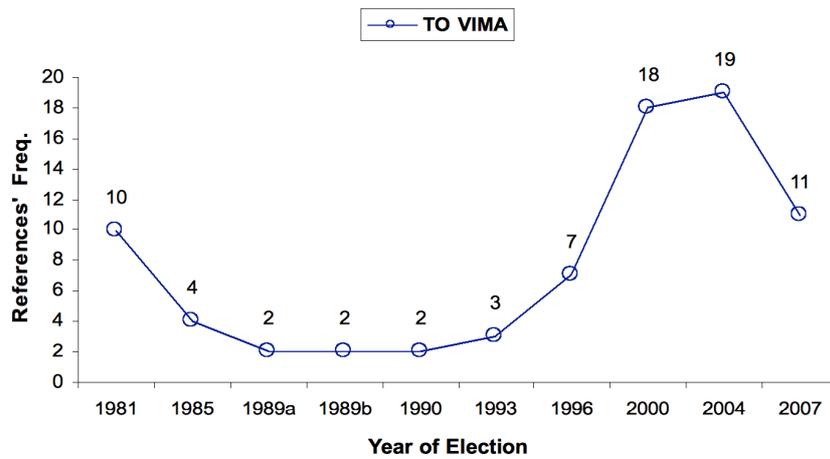


Diagram 2: Representation of references in “To Vima” newspaper

- A decline in the number of references from 1981 until 1990 can be justified by the fact that since the Socialist party won the elections of 1981 and its power was largely uncontested, there was little need for intensive exposure on TV or to pay special attention to political communication. Therefore, the newspaper articles do not put emphasis on the communicative policy of PASOK but instead on the politics being exercised.
- An increase from 1993 onwards is clearly visible in the above diagram, reaching a peak in the 2004 elections when there was a high likelihood that PASOK, after a long period in power, would lose the election, as was finally the case.

Identifying The Periods Of Greek Media Democracy

The observations and remarks above on Greek media democracy confirm our initial comments in the introduction. Different democracies and varying conditions create alternative forms of media democracy. In the Greek case, there is clear evidence of this continuous contrast and synthesis between global trends and national peculiarities.

The categorization of Greek media democracy is based on two criteria: a) events that took place and had an impact on the inter-connection between the media and politics, and b) the results of the qualitative content analysis in the front pages of the newspaper articles previously mentioned.

More specifically, according to the political innovations introduced in Greek politics and the significant events that altered the route of political communication in Greece, **five periods of time in Greek media democracy** have been identified.

a) 1981-1987 State monopoly in the media. Growing politicization of the media.

This period can be characterized as the **introductory - while still “innocent” - period of media democracy**. The starting point is 1981 when “three positive innovations” (Makedonia, 17/10/1981) signaled the advent of political communication in Greece. One of these innovations was the “free use of TV by all political parties” (Makedonia, 17/10/1981), which was appreciated as the democratization of electoral contradictions. This was still during the reign of public service broadcasting, when the crucial elections of 1981 boosted political opposition. In the electoral period of October 1981, it became clear that the strength of the Socialist party was growing, and equality in political means of communication was vital in the struggle between the two biggest political parties (ND and PASOK) with smaller parties fighting for their own participation in a fair political game. This is the reason why the regulation of TV air-time during the electoral period was one of the primary goals of the newly-established inter-party committee, which was attempting to achieve an equitable and proportional allocation of TV air-time for all parties based on the number of parliamentary seats gained in the previous elections in 1977. Therefore, the principal issue in political communication was the set-

tlement of TV air-time and the coverage of political rallies (see indic. “Makedonia” 20-09-1981, 10-05-1985 and “To Vima”, 24-09-1981, 2-05-1985).

In this polemic atmosphere, TV was respected for the opportunities it could provide to politicians as an open forum for presenting their ideas. In parallel, several technical characteristics of TV were, for the first time, utilized widely and professionally in an undisguised way. The names of TV directors were by now becoming known, simultaneously signifying a new era in the inter-connection between politics and TV, as it had become evident that TV could serve as something more than a simple medium for publicizing politics. The first “fearful” comments on political marketing and the professional promotion of politicians were published (see indic. Metaxas, To Vima, 9-10-1981) in an attempt to warn of the imminent pervasion of media techniques in political campaigns and the need to educate citizens in these “imported” political methods. The rise of “image” and the significance of the political leader’s personal profile are also underlined (Sunday To Vima, 10-11/10-1981).

Steadily, the use of TV became an indispensable part of politics, and during the national elections of 1985, the use of cameras and direction of camera-shots in political rallies was entrusted to experienced TV directors. TV was engaged professionally as a new tool for political campaigns. It should be pointed out that during this period only public service television was available, and the concern that it was somehow patronized by the government party moderating the freedom of speech. During this period, though, politicians used the media and not vice versa, as was to happen subsequently. TV was in the service of politics and was the medium which offered a new, broad publicization of politics, yet its effects were still controllable by politics. The “politicization of the media” was underway. To this end, the media was primarily involved in the communicative dimension of politics without interfering in internal processes such as party politics. This new political medium seemed very pervasive and effective in influencing the electoral behavior of citizens not yet “suspicious” of media techniques and media logic, and who accepted the reality of TV representations more easily.

b) 1987-1996. Liberalization of the media. The era of de-regulation

After the increasing exploitation of TV throughout two electoral periods (1981 and 1985), the necessity for the liberalization of telecommunications

arose as the inevitable result of the continuous democratization of political life in Greece, which had begun following the Reinstitution of Democracy in 1974. Political democracy had thus entered a more mature phase and had brought with it higher expectations. Public service broadcasting was perceived as an embracement, a barrier to the freedom of speech, and it was anticipated that the state broadcasting monopoly would become an obstacle to political freedom. It was obvious that the situation in Greece was incompatible with the international political communication scene and with professionally conducted electoral campaigns. Broader political changes outside Greece also boosted developments (Kotzaivazoglou & Zotos, 2006: 1-2).

In Greek media democracy, the first efforts towards “free” television took place in 1987 as the result of a continuous struggle and political contradiction between the governing socialist party at that time (PASOK) and the major liberal political party (ND) in opposition. The core argument of the political contradiction was the pressure applied by ND for the need to “liberate” freedom of speech and to abolish the state monopoly in the area of telecommunications. In 1989, the first municipal television channel (TV-100 in Thessaloniki) commenced broadcasting in Northern Greece (see also Papathanasopoulos, 2005:286-287). Dramatic changes then followed in the new liberalized media, while the legal status of the private media was still dubious and thus obscure. The role of the media changed steadily towards more active and aggressive ways to publicise politics. In this initial stage, the idea of a symbiosis between the media and politics with no serious implications was not strongly contested. Gradually, the media gained their “parity” with politics as decisive factors in political life.

During the period in question, Greek society had to anticipate two parallel and opposing phenomena: First, the sudden deregulation of the media that led to the pluralism of TV channels but with an uncertain legal status. Second, the rising, and sometimes annoying, interference of the media in political procedures gave cause for concern regarding the sensitive line between the positive effects of deregulation on the freedom of speech and the negative effects it could have on the organization of political life. Surveys of media spectatorship revealed that citizens relied on TV channels for their political information. Moreover, the elections of April 1990 were the first elections that were conducted with the presence of private TV channels that were trying to gain a foothold in telecommunications at a crucial moment in Greek politics

that sought for stability and normalization. The struggle between the new liberal regime in media communications and memories of former “safe” public service broadcasting still haunted a Greek society trying to maintain a balance between international communication trends and the new, rapid changes in domestic communicative ethos. The position of private media corporations was still uncertain as was their legal status.

It can also be deduced from the newspaper articles, especially during the 1993 elections, that there was a shift in interest in political communication towards methods other than political rallies. The presentation of political leaders on TV was commented on adequately, surveys are appreciated for what they reveal about the electorate and the idea of political dialogue on TV is prominent positioned in front-page references. (Papathanasopoulos, 2000a)

In this era, TV was internalized in politics as an unavoidable dimension and steadily became a manipulative factor. Commercialization and the investment of private capital in media corporations imposed their own rules and conditions on TV and increased the penetrating effect of television. This is the beginning of the process of “modernization” in Greek political communication.

c) 1996-2000 The inauguration of TV as the official forum of politics.

The year 1996 is the starting point of the official televised period in Greek Media Democracy with the two major political parties in Greece having recognized and agreed formally on the importance of TV in political communication and in election campaigns. This derives from the fact that they decided to address television as their official public forum for political debate. Therefore, M. Evert (ND) and K. Simitis (PASOK) began to employ TV as their main political arena and the first debate between political leaders in Greece (13-09-1996) appeared on TV screens with strict rules and very formal procedures. Newspapers devoted numerous articles to the “debate” phenomenon and its American origins. Presentation skills and “televised” profiles of political leaders (K. Simitis- PASOK and M. Evert-ND) were extensively commented on and their communicative ability, attire and presentation of their arguments were analytically discussed in articles (Efthimiou, 1996; Pretenderis,

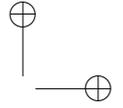
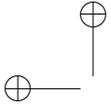
1996) emphasizing the indisputable reality of the TV screen in revealing the personality of the leaders.

This was the first intentional attempt by official politics to move towards the new era of political communication which has favored, consequently, forms of “indirect” mediatised communication. The previous example indicates that the engagement of the media in politics was not only promoted by the media themselves, but was also a political decision since politicians consciously accepted media interference in politics. Certainly, this “acceptance” did not mean that politics was surrendered unconditionally to the media, but what has followed indicates the weakness of politics to resist the communicative ascendancy of the media, which was expanding day-by-day into all areas of political and social life.

Another important innovation that was first implemented during the 1996 National Elections was “**exit polls,**” attracting the interest of political analysts as a reliable method of predicting the result of forthcoming elections (*To Vima, Sunday edition, 22-09-1996*). The advantages and disadvantages of this new method are underlined, and this is the moment when survey companies and analysts assume a prominent role in the political game.

d) 2000-2007: The use of Internet in election campaigns and disputes

The fourth period identified, from 2000 until 2007, saw the extended use of the Internet in electoral politics, which promised a shift towards participatory politics. First, PASOK set up a website in 1996 that remained inactive until 1999. Other political parties have also launched their own websites that were partly employed in the 2000 elections, but these were still in their infancy. As Kostikopoulou points out: “Of almost 35 political parties that participated in the national elections of 2000, only 16 had some presence on the Internet” (2002:197). In these elections, the first web portals (greekelections.gr, elections2000.gr, metapolis.gr) devoted exclusively to elections appeared, contributing to the new era of e-political contradiction. Discussions on new “Internet Democracy” come in the foreground, spreading a positive feeling about the potential of new media to promote more direct communication with politicians. (Lainas, 2000)

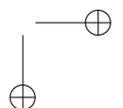
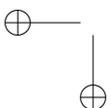


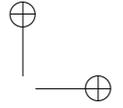
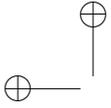
Political advertisement is also portrayed more extensively, while opinion polls and opinion polls are used to promote political tactics. Since political opposition in the 2000 elections was fierce and quite undecided, political parties became engaged in any possible political method to convince citizens (“Elections of 2000: Anything to win!” Makedonia 22-03-2000). Subsequently, in certain cases, exaggeration and negativity have occurred, turning political opposition into an uncontrolled arena.

e) 2007 – to date. Towards interactive political communication?

The fifth period began in the more recent elections of September 2007. SKAI TV and the popular website YouTube established co-operation to provide citizens with an open forum of communication with politicians. With the aim of facilitating democratic dialogue and enhancing the participation of citizens in the political process, SKAI TV channel - in four different broadcasts under the title: “SKAI-YouTube Debate: Citizens Asking Politicians” - posed questions that users of YouTube had uploaded on the YouTube website. Invited politicians had to confront and answer these questions following a very specific procedure. This innovative effort of SKAI TV channel was a pioneer broadcast in Europe, but was certainly an Americanised model, following CNN in the USA, trying to pursue a new approach towards political communication by increasing audience participation. This is the latest tendency in political communication that, although embraced primarily by younger people, has not really been valued as it might. The reasons for this lack of appreciation and impact following all the efforts described above can be put down to, first of all, the national tragedy of forest fires in Southern Greece that naturally captured public interest and left no space for communication tactics. The other reason is the fact that this was a relatively short electoral period, at the end of summer, suggesting that there was little time for citizens to react and fully evaluate this new approach.

We also detect that social media and Facebook are employed as important communicative tools in political communication especially in 2009 national elections. It is evident that the Greek political system has enriched political campaigns by taking advantage of new communicative tools basically for the purpose of attracting younger citizens in politics.



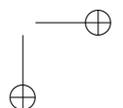
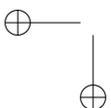


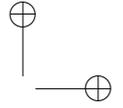
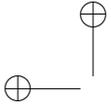
The issue is whether this effort will set the starting point for the employment of Internet and the inter-activity that this medium offers towards more participatory forms of political communication.

If we wish to draw some general conclusions from the above analysis, it could be argued that the “explosion” of private-commercial media in Greece has largely followed the global model. First, “media democracy” was established and developed very rapidly, and only later did attempt to regulate the new communicative environment that emerged. Greek media democracy was legitimized retro-actively. This situation where “de facto” legitimization has preceded “de jure” legitimization, which is still shrouded in doubt, is to be blamed for problems that were created and still remain unsolved. Progressively, these problems were exaggerated, assuming dimensions that could have been avoided had legal “providence” in collaboration with political doughtiness interfered in the early stages of the newly-formed political arena. Some of these problems were confronted by the latest Revision of the Greek Constitution in 2001 and several amendments and changes in relevant articles (5A, 9A, 14, 15) were proposed in an effort to provide a more solid basis for media democracy and introduce new rights inherent in the new regime. Simultaneously, the protection of “information” was upgraded to the level of a constitutional right and was placed alongside the already well-known constitutional rights. In general, the establishment and evolution of media democracy in Greece has followed western models and experiences, encompassing at the same time specific features of Greek society and politics.

Conclusions

The independence between the fields of “media” and “politics”, using Bourdieu’s (1998) theoretical concepts (also see Couldry, 2003), seems to be negated by media democracy. ‘Media democracy,’ as the unified term for the description of contemporary democracy, proves the truth of this argument. Most commonly, the term is used to describe the ways in which the media has acquired a decisive role in the political process. The concept of “mediacracy” goes one step beyond this and supports the thesis of the media being not only a strong interference in politics but also acting as a catalyst in political life by internalizing politics in media logic and regulations.



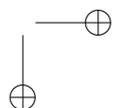
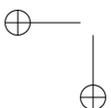


Democracy is nowadays necessarily seen through the lens of media democracy because the media predominantly shapes reality and is the basic source of information. Democracy has always been interwoven with a communicative dimension since pluralism and an exchange of ideas is a necessary prerequisite. We should pinpoint though, to avoid absolute negativism, that the “technological” route to media democracy - as a procedural and communicative parameter - was inevitable following technological developments in telecommunications. What could have been prevented, with the assistance of political will and a legislative framework, was the full identification of modern democracy in the terms of “mediacracy”. The fear of the media jeopardizing the political system and democratic values is always present if the media and its publicity is met with unconditional obedience.

The Greek case shows, on the other hand, that each society faces global communication trends in its own way, even if steadily is tending to internalize them. Commercial media was introduced suddenly into Greek politics with no real preparation, and thus some of their Americanized attributes were not easily accepted, and were considered “suspicious” for their interference in political procedures. This confirms our initial argument and hypothesis that each media democracy, beyond its similarity to the American model, should be examined individually.

However, characteristics empowered by the media, such as the symbolic dimension of politics (Edelman 1985), are present in all media democracies. If we a general term could be found to describe the current condition, it could be argued that we are now in the era of “**meta-democracy**” and that this new aspect of democracy under the contemporary rules that govern politics, the media and the public sphere should be investigated. The analysis of the newly-restructured and modernized “Informational State” (Braman, 2006) can provide useful insights to allow the phenomenon to be understood in its totality. Media democracy is a historical form of democracy that should be addressed under the regulations of its production and consumption simultaneously, and always in relation to the modern connotations and functions of the media and politics. When a specific social and political phenomenon emerges, it is because specific social conditions have surfaced that are creating new demands and forms of communication.

The long-term study of Greek newspapers shows that the media sphere is steadily absorbing the political sphere. Unfortunately, the “new public space



of politics” (Ortega, 2004), which is literally media space, does not always comply with democratic axioms like transparency, equality of participation and other ethical and political issues. This happens partly because it does not acquire the legality of its actions through democratic principles but instead on commercial and “spectacular” criteria. The argument that the media has only altered procedural changes in democracy is not accurate because the “quality” of democratic procedures determines democracy itself. “Media democracy” as a term should be approached critically, examining whether the word “democracy” fulfils its basic premise.

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